

Preserving cultural heritage by teaching idioms to young learners as part of imaginative language in Setswana

**Authors:**

Refilwe Ramagoshi¹
Ina Joubert¹

Affiliation:

¹Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Refilwe Ramagoshi,
Refilwe.Ramagoshi@up.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 07 May 2015

Accepted: 27 Mar. 2016

Published: 03 Dec. 2016

How to cite this article:

Ramagoshi, R. & Joubert, I., 2016, 'Preserving cultural heritage by teaching idioms to young learners as part of imaginative language in Setswana', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 6(1), a279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i1.279>

Copyright:

© 2016. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Teachers need creative strategies and techniques when teaching idioms in Setswana. However, they do not know what idioms are nor are they aware that through idioms cultural heritage can be preserved and that idioms can be taught as part of imaginative language, especially in Grade 3. As a result, teachers and learners in Grade 3 Setswana classes lack the understanding of the role of idioms and language proficiency in using and writing idioms. The aim of this paper was to show how intervention could help teachers with new strategies for teaching idioms. Constructivism and the five subtheories of decoding idioms were used (Liu 2008). The project consisted of two research-based phases and the findings showed that teachers can now use their own initiative and creativity in language teaching and the learners learned and retained the idioms they have learnt.

Introduction

Idioms are categorised as imaginative language and as 'devices used to add spice to a language and instil appreciation of the beauty of one's language' (Seboni 1980:iv). As idioms are part of everyday speech as well as of the literature, including literature for young children, they need to be taught in class. If learners are not taught idioms properly, they will be deprived of the cultural values, customs, practices, rituals, traditions and symbols embodied in their indigenous languages. African languages are by nature idiomatic. Idiomatic language often challenges one to use one's imagination fully in order to grasp the meaning of sentences or statements used in everyday communication. The challenges of this research project were found in the Foundation Phase teachers who lacked the knowledge of Setswana idioms and the use of these idioms, which inevitably resulted in the absence in teaching them. As a result, they did not show any creative strategies and techniques for teaching idioms in Foundation Phase.

In South Africa, the curriculum for Home Language as set in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education 2011) states that teaching imaginative language has to be an integral part of language teaching. However, there are discrepancies between policy and practice. In addition, there is no clear description of idioms in the National Curriculum Statement. From this perspective, we wanted to address the following question:

To what extent can a programme empower Grade 3 Setswana teachers to teach idioms as part of imaginative language?

In reviewing the relevant literature, we adopted a threefold analysis in a Grade 3 classroom when asking the following pertinent questions: What are idioms? How are idioms taught and learnt? What are the sociolinguistic impediments to the teaching of idioms? And what are the challenges teachers could experience when teaching Setswana idioms as imaginative language? In addition, we reviewed the literature when designing the content of a programme that could assist teachers to teach Setswana idioms to Grade 3 learners.

Idioms and their complexity in language use

It is not easy to define an idiom. We approached it from the premise that definitions differ from one researcher to another. Many researchers, such as Miruka (1994), Moon (1998), Liu (2003) and Bauer and Brown (2001), describe what idioms are, but there does not seem to be a single concise definition. According to Hockett (1958:172), an idiom entails individual morphemes, which is a broader description than that suggested by Liu (2008). Liu (2008:3) gives a comprehensive

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

description of an idiom as including 'fixed phrases, clichés, formulaic speeches, proverbs, slang expressions, and at the extreme, single polysemic words'. Hocket (1958) and Liu (2008) both see an idiom 'as less rigid and much harder to learn as it consists of an immense accumulation of verbal habits' Cooper (1998:255), on the other hand, explains that idioms are part of figurative language, which includes metaphors, similes and proverbs, which are at times difficult to understand because they do not mean what they literally mean.

Seboni (1980) states that in Setswana, idioms are an attempt to instil an appreciation of the beauty of a language, whilst Ntsan'wisi (1965:16) (referring to Xitsonga) defines an idiom as 'a fixed structural form or a fixed phrasal pattern of words which go together'. According to the CAPS glossary, an 'Image is a picture or visual representation of something', whilst 'imagery is defined as words, phrases and sentences which create images in our mind such as similes, metaphors, personification' (Department of Basic Education 2011:94). However, these definitions do not explain what constitutes imaginative language. Idioms are an international phenomenon and have a unique structure according to different languages. In the African context, idioms are formulaic as compared with Western languages. We concur with Ntsan'wisi and define an idiom as a fixed phrase; in Setswana, idioms are fixed phrases that start with a prefix *Go-*. A few examples are presented here:

- *Go tlhoka tsebe* [to be without an ear]
- *Ga o reetse* [you do not listen]
- *Go hupa tedu* [to have your beard between your lips]
- *Go ngala* [to be peevish or irritated]
- *Go nna teme pedi o se gopane* [to have two tongues, yet you are not an iguana/lizard]
- *Go aka* [to be a liar].

Idioms are supposed to be learnt from home as they are part of the culture in which the child grows. McCarthy *et al.* (2003:452 in citing Tony Bennet [1995; 1996]) state that culture as a broader concept comprises 'a set of dynamic, productive, and generative material [and immaterial] practices that regulate social conduct and behaviour, and that emphasize personal self-management (i.e., the modification of habits, tastes, and style), political affiliation, and trans/national identity'. Moreover, Andah (1995:13) concurs that 'language like culture is a means of self-identification'.

Parents and adults in the community are supposed to use idioms in their daily speech so that the child grows up hearing them as part of the imaginative language. A person who is highly imaginative is capable of conceptualising new ideas or ideas based on exciting things with ease. By the time the learner is in Foundation Phase, especially Grade 3, they should have a basic knowledge of idioms. This should be the knowledge they acquired from home as part of their heritage.

The types of idioms relevant for Setswana

Gibbs (1987, cited by Cooper 1998:257) is of the opinion that 'the linguistic characteristics of idioms, such as their degree

of syntactic flexibility and the closeness between literal and figurative meanings, affect the ease with which they can be acquired'. They distinguish the following three types of idioms according to their characteristics and the level of difficulty:

- **Frozen idioms:** these idioms cannot be syntactically transformed into the passive voice and still retain their figurative meaning. For example, Gibbs (1987:571) asserts that the idiom *John kicked the bucket* cannot be changed into the passive voice and still retains the figurative meaning of *John died*. He is of the opinion that children and adults 'process syntactically frozen idioms faster than they do syntactically flexible expressions' because they are heard more frequently in only one syntactic form rather than in several and are therefore internalised as a single lexical item.
- **Transparent idioms:** if an idiomatic expression is transparent, there is a clearer and closer relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of the expression than in the opaque idiom. For example, in *her words were a slap in the face*, the figurative meaning of disappoint or insult is closely related to the literal meaning.
- **Opaque idioms:** in this type of idioms, the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings is obscure or opaque. For example, in *John kept beating around the bush*, the figurative meaning of John kept avoiding something is not immediately apparent.

In view of the above categorisation and the abilities of Grade 3 Setswana-speaking learners, we selected only transparent idioms for our idiom programme.

Aspects related to the impediments to teaching Setswana idioms effectively

South Africa is a multilingual and multicultural country, which currently has 11 official languages: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda, as well as minority foreign languages such as German, Greek, Chinese, French and some Indian languages. This multilingual context creates language contact situations in which the various languages influence each other's development (Mutasa 1999). Processes such as code-mixing, code-switching, borrowing and adaptation are inevitable. This sociolinguistic process also affects Setswana, which moreover has seven dialects, of which not all words are accepted as standard language (Malimabe 1990).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical frameworks used in this study were constructivism (based on the theories of Piaget [1965], Bruner [1960] and Vygotsky [1986]) and five subtheories that show how learners learn and decode idioms (Bobrow and Bell 1973; Gibbs 1980; Liu 2008; Swinney and Cutler 1979). These subtheories are (1) literal first or idiom list, (2) simultaneous processing or lexical representation, (3) the figurative first or direct access, (4) compositional analysis and (5) the dual

idiom representation. In constructivist theory, a learner should be self-directed, that is, he or she should have initiative and creativity in facilitating own learning process. Piaget (1954) held the view that children construct knowledge of the world through assimilation and accommodation, but he emphasised biological maturity as a necessary condition. The child extends and increases this inherent knowledge (the knowledge he or she is born with) through his or her own experiences. In this study, the learners constructed learning about culture through language learning. In this research, we merged these two theories into an emerging theory (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows an ideal situation of teaching and learning idioms in the South African and international context. The arrows show the idioms being taught, through constructivism and how the learners can decode idioms using the five subtheories for decoding. Internationally, studies found that when all the five subtheories are used, depending on the level of the idioms taught, it increased the levels of language proficiency. For our studies, we used this emerging theoretical framework to analyse the data in order to understand the research findings of Phase 1 and to assist us with the development of the programme for Setswana idioms.

Methodology

The research was conducted according to ethical principles and in two phases using the practitioner methodology. Lankshear and Knobel (2004:4) are of the opinion that teacher research 'involves teachers researching their own classrooms, with or without collaborative support from other teachers'.

Steyn (2014) in her research, used the practitioner research method. She conducted her research in her own classroom as

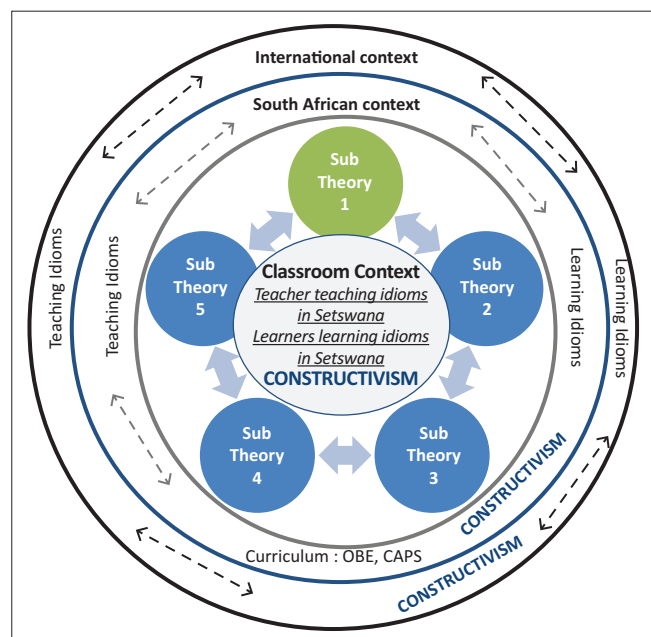
teacher and researcher. Two of her colleagues were also included in her research. As reiterated by Ferrance (2001:1), practitioner research must be conducted within the environment of the teacher.

In this research, during Phase 1, three Grade 3 Setswana teachers were observed in class whilst teaching all the subjects in Setswana. Focus was more on the teaching and usage of idioms during the lessons, especially during Setswana reading.

The findings of Phase 1 informed us to venture into Phase 2. Phase 2 constituted the development and implementation of the programme, and the three teachers were the ones who did the implementation in their respective classrooms.

In Phase 1, our investigation consisted of the observation of different data collection strategies, one of which was Setswana lessons in three Grade 3 classes to see whether the teachers understood and used idioms in their daily communication with the learners and when teaching and speaking, reading and writing. This allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of how participants relate to and interact with one another in a classroom and how they make meaning of the teaching and learning of idioms (Nieuwenhuis 2010).

Relevant documents as well as the notes from the researcher's diary and transcripts of the audio recordings were also used. Sixteen interview questions were used for focus interviews to determine whether the Setswana teachers knew what idioms as imaginative language are and how to teach them. School 1 with one Grade 3 class was situated in a semi-rural area where Setswana is predominant, whilst School 2 with two Grade 3 classes was situated in an urban area or township.



Source: Ramagoshi R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes. Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 1: Emerging theory of idiom teaching and learning.

Research findings from Phase 1 of the study

The findings in Phase 1 showed that Grade 3 teachers did not teach idioms because they did not know this was required and stated in the CAPS document and because the coaches did not instruct them to do so. Coaches are trained subject advisors deployed to schools by the Department of Basic Education to assist the teachers in implementing the CAPS curriculum. The themes and categories identified in Phase 1 are as follows:

In the following paragraphs, we elucidate the themes and show how these findings informed Phase 2.

Teachers were not aware that idioms are part of imaginative language in the CAPS documents. Some prescribed readers even had idioms as titles, but the teacher never emphasised any of these idioms during the reading period. There were no teaching strategies or methods to make learners aware of idioms in their daily speech or the teacher's daily language in class. The CAPS ready-made workbooks supplied by coaches did touch on language proficiency or indicate how they could be used by teachers during the teaching of Setswana. The

teachers seemed to be unaware of anything concerning the teaching of imaginative language in Setswana Home Language.

There was also interference by sociolinguistic aspects such as non-standard language, for example, Pretoria Sotho, code-switching and code-mixing, as well as dialectal problems in the classroom and during interviews with Grade 3 teachers and the focus group in both schools.

Teachers themselves did not tap on what the learners know from home as far as the use of idioms and standard Setswana in the classroom is concerned. Therefore, the cultural heritage can be lost.

In view of the above findings, we deemed it fit to design an idiom intervention programme. The programme was designed to assist Setswana teachers to teach idioms creatively and is called *Setswana idioms in picture form*. We implemented the programme as Phase 2 of the study and collected data at the same time through co-teaching and demonstration of the teaching of idioms. We then observed and analysed how the teachers and learners understand the Setswana idioms (Phase 2, 2014).

Programme design: *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme (2014)

Setswana idioms in picture form was conceived to help teachers by introducing new methods of teaching idioms, building on theory as indicated in Figure 2. The following processes were adopted in the design and implementation of the programme (Phase 2).

Examples of idioms in picture form used in Grade 3 classes are presented Figures 5–8.



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 2: Phitlhelelo ya Puisokwalo (Pooe 2011).

Sixteen transparent idioms were used in this programme. Five of these were used in the project by each teacher:

- *Go ja ditlhare ka meno* [to eat trees with teeth]: to be mad
- *Go fatlha magotlo* [to blind the mice]: to urinate (males)
- *Go nna dinala ditelele* [to have long nails]: to be a thief
- *Go ja ntšwa* [to eat a dog]: to be poor
- *Go supa letsatsi* [to point at the sun]: to refuse point blank
- *Go ja motho direthe* [to eat someone's heels]: to gossip about someone.

Use of prescribed readers

The same prescribed readers used in Phase 1 were again used in both schools. The three teachers were made aware of the idioms identified in the reader in 2013.

Use of learning and teaching support material teaching aids

Pictures were made of sixteen transparent idioms as well as flash cards with the idioms written on them and separate flash cards with the meaning of each idiom (see Figures 5–8).

Phase 2: Demonstration by researchers – using anecdotes in teachings idioms

We did the lesson presentation which took into account the findings in Phase 1 that teachers did not know what idioms are. We had to use anecdotes or incidents that learners are familiar with in order to encourage them to think and use their imagination. The anecdotes were used as a form of practice for the teachers and the learners to form a good idea of what idioms are, how to teach idioms and how the learners understood the teaching of idioms. To ascertain that the teachers understood the presentation, we then observed the teachers teaching idioms in Phase 2.

Practice 1 in Phase 2: Introduction of idioms through anecdotes by Grade 3 teachers

Teachers A, B and C were asked to choose their own idioms to present to the learners in order for them to gain confidence before teaching *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme.

From our observation, Teacher A understood what idioms are. She managed to use role-play and different anecdotes to make the learners understand the idioms very well. She re-emphasised the idioms by asking questions on the idioms she had taught using other forms of explanation, such as role-play and demonstration. One could see that the learners understood what the teacher was teaching them. The teacher and the learners understood what idioms are.

Our observation of the presentation of idioms by Teacher B was that she did well by using a number of demonstrations to help the learners understand what idioms entail. However, she used two phrases which she described as Setswana idioms although they were not (*Go itlhaganela ke fa motho a itlhaganetse* [to be in a hurry is when you are in a hurry]). She repeated the saying which is not an explanation. This was an indication that the teacher did not fully understand what idioms are before she started teaching them.

We observed that Teacher C did not understand that she had to select her own idioms to use as practice before introducing the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme. Even though she used the same idioms we used in the anecdotes, she explained them very well through questioning skills.

Practice 2 in Phase 2: Teaching of idioms during reading by Grade 3 teachers

For the teachers to get enough practice of teaching idioms, they had to use the same readers as in Phase 1 which were still prescribed in 2014 (see Figures 2–4). The aim was to see whether they know how to explain the idioms that we have identified in these readers. The findings in Phase 1 showed that the teachers did not explain to the learners the idioms in the above prescribed work during classroom observation. The title of Figure 3 is an idiom, but it was not explained as an idiom in Phase 1.

Teacher A: The story used for reading was *Toro ya Pule*. We observed that this teacher, as a strategy or an afterthought, had read the story before she extracted idioms and explained them to the learners one by one. The learners showed enthusiasm and understanding of the idioms that appeared in the reader because they were explained in the context of the story.

Teacher B: The story used for reading was *Go thuba lebelo*. The observation we made was that the teaching strategy used by the teacher confused the learners. They were not given an

opportunity to discover new knowledge based on their own initiative and creativity; the teacher rushed to explain what the idiom meant. The teacher was still not sure how idioms should be taught. The mistranslations in the story (the reader had been translated from English into Setswana) made the teacher's lesson even more incoherent. The translation failed the teacher because (for example) the word *lebaleba* [to flicker your eyes] had been mistranslated as 'to look here and there'.

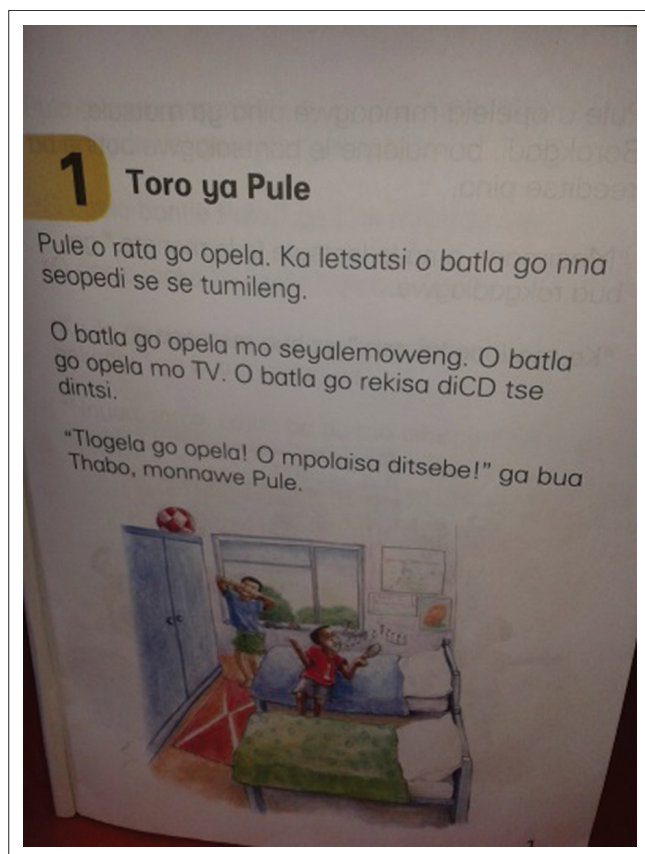
Teacher C used the same reader as Teacher B. She had a clear command of Setswana. She explained all the idioms appearing in the story up to where she had read it and asked guiding questions that helped the learners understand the idioms. She also used more than one example to explain an idiom to make sure that the learners understood the idioms in the context of the story. Comprehension of the story was emphasised and helped in the understanding of the idioms. Both the teacher and the learners understood what idioms are.

Introduction of *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme (Phase 2)

After the demonstration of teaching idioms by the researcher and the teachers' practice lessons, the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme was introduced by the teachers. Each teacher was asked to present a lesson based on only five idioms they had selected from the 16 idioms in picture form we had provided.

Teacher A's lesson presentation

Teacher A (School 1): The teacher introduced the lesson by linking it with the anecdotes and reading lessons on Setswana idioms. Every time the teacher put a picture on the board, she would ask the learners what they saw in the picture. When she was satisfied with the answer, she would put the written



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 3: Toro ya Pule School 1 (Pooe 2011).



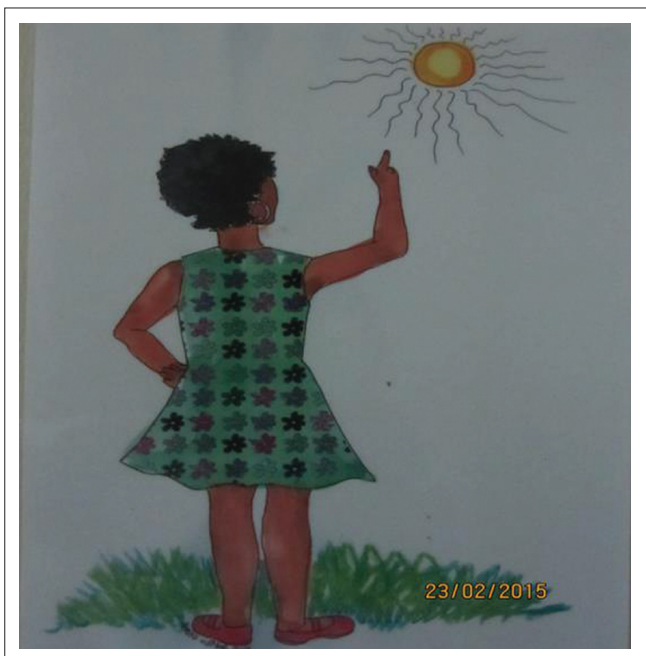
Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 4: Go thuba lebelo (Mekgwe 2012) – School 2.



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 5: A boy urinating.



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 6: Girl pointing at the sun.

idiom on the flash card next to the picture; then, after emphasising the answer, she put the correct written answer on a flash card next to the idiom.

A picture of a boy urinating

At first the learners giggled when they saw this idiom in picture form. The picture aroused interest and each learner was trying to interpret the picture the way it made sense to them. The learners all interpreted the picture literally – that they saw a picture of a boy urinating.

Mosimane o a rota (the boy is urinating). One learner said: *O ntsha metsi* [he is taking out water], which is a good answer that showed that there are more polite ways of saying a boy is



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 7: Boy biting a girl's ear.



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 8: Two women picking meat or food morsels from each other's teeth.

urinating. The teacher then explained that in Setswana culture one does not say *Mosimane o a rota*, but *Mosimane o fatlha magotlo/dipeba* [the boy is blinding the mice]. One is expected to say it in the form of a euphemism. Thus, a synonym of this idiom is *Go ntsha metsi* [to take out the water].

Teacher B's lesson presentation

The method followed was more one of 'tell and repeat' – the teacher says an idiom and the learners repeat after her.

The teacher taught in a hurried manner. She would put the picture on the board, ask a question based on the picture and immediately answered her own question, without giving the learners a fair chance to think about the picture. The following is an example of how she went about teaching: the teacher started the lesson by showing the picture to the learners and asking them: *Re bona eng mo mafokong a a kere go gana go gana (morutabana o ba bontsha setshwantsho, o se kgomaretsa mo patitšhokong- o kgomaretsa le dipapetlana tsa mafoko)* [Look at the words. Is it to refuse, to refuse?] [The teacher showed the learners a picture, pasted the picture on the board – at the same time, she pasted the flash card of the idiom in Setswana].

The learners immediately responded *Mam, ke go supa letsatsi.* (it is to point at the sun). The teacher confirmed this, saying, *O supile letsatsi a kere? O supile letsatsi a re 'Ke a gana'* [She is pointing at the sun, is that not so? She is pointing at the sun and saying 'I am refusing'.]. The teacher immediately pasted the flash card with the idiom and repeated *Go supa letsatsi* [to point at the sun]. She again just said *Lo e tshwere?* [You got it?], and immediately introduced the second idiom in the same manner as the first one, showing them a picture of the idiom and saying *O mo loma tsebe.* The learners repeated after the teacher and said *Go loma tsebe* [he is biting her ear]. The teacher asked: *He? Eng?* [What?] and the learners again repeated *Go loma tsebe* [to bite the ear]. The teacher hardly gave the learners a chance to think on their own; she repeated the idiom rhetorically. Then the learners got the cue from the teacher that they were expected to repeat what she said. The teacher then asked the learners: *Ke go dira eng go loma tsebe?* [What is it to bite the ear?] and the learners responded correctly: *Wa mo, sebela!* [he is whispering to her]. The teacher said: *Wa mo, sebela a kere! Mpi tla o tlo mponentsha gore 'Go sebela'. go dirwa jang* [she is whispering to her, is that not so? Mpi, come and demonstrate to me 'to whisper']. She then put up the flash card of the idiom and the meaning next to the pictures.

Teacher C's lesson presentation

The teacher started the presentation by linking it with previous knowledge, reminding the learners that previously they had learnt idioms, but today they were going to learn them in picture form. Her teaching method was to put all the pictures on the board at the start whilst asking the learners to tell her what they saw in each picture. After exhausting their answers, she produced the idiom flash card and explained that the Batswana nation could then formulate an idiom based on an incident. She then proceeded to put the flash card with the correct meaning next to the picture. This is how she went about using some of her facilitating skills.

Picture of two women picking meat or food morsels from each other's teeth.

The learners giggled at the two women, and when the teacher asked them what they saw, the learners gave different answers such as *Ba ntshana meno* and *Ba tshasana melomo* [they are taking out each other's teeth, and they are applying

(lipstick) to each other's lips]. When the teacher noticed that they were having trouble finding the correct answer, she painted the following scenario: *Fa o fetsa go ja nama e khibidu, o itsukula legano go ntsha dinama. Fa o na le diphatlha, dinama di tseno mo menong. O batla letlhokwana wa di ntsha. Jaanong re tlhama leele. Leele le re le tlhamang ka tiragalo e, ke: Go ntshana se inong. Ke fa batho e le ditsala tse ditona mme ba sa sisimogane go ka tshwara meno a yo mongwe.* [After eating red meat, you rinse your mouth to take out leftover meat. If you have gaps, the meat gets into them. You look for a toothpick and take the leftover pieces out. Now we coin an idiom].

The idiom we coin from of this incident is *Go ntshana se inong*, meaning to be best friends that are even prepared to touch each other's teeth.

Revision and activity on Setswana idioms in picture form programme

It was very important to ascertain whether the learners understood the idioms that were taught. The revision comprised idioms introduced by us as anecdotes, by the teachers when introducing their own idioms, during reading and when the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme was introduced.

We were happy to observe that the learners showed a good understanding of what Setswana idioms are; we did not have to remind them of any idioms that had been taught earlier. We only had to re-emphasise their meaning to ensure that the idioms were interpreted correctly. The examples of idioms that learners gave were from lessons on anecdotes and idioms in picture form, with only one example from the reading lessons. This shows that *Setswana idioms in picture form* was effective.

Activity based on Setswana idioms in picture form

After we had finished with the questions, we introduced and explained how the activity was going to work. The idioms and meanings were handed out to pairs of learners as strips in envelopes (see Figures 17–18). The idioms and their answers were mixed, and the idea was to see which pair would correctly match the correct idiom to the correct meaning first. We kept on reminding the learners of the idioms they had learnt and that idioms started with *Go-*. They had to read carefully what was written on the strips, then put down the idiom, look for the meaning and put it next to the idiom. The following are examples of the activity strips and their answers:

Maele (Idioms [Figures 9–12]).



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 9: Idiom flash card.

Go kgora ka mpana tsoopedi

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 10: Maele (Idioms [Figures 9–12]).

Go supa letsatsi

Source: Ramagoshi R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 11: Maele (Idioms [Figures 9–12]).

Go ja motho direthe

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 12: Maele (Idioms [Figures 9–12]).

Dikarabo (Figures 13–16).

Go nna mo tlalelong kgotsa mo mathateng

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 13: Dikarabo.

Ke fa motho a jele thata

Source: Ramagoshi R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 14: Dikarabo.

Ke fa motho a gana go dira sengwe

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 15: Dikarabo.

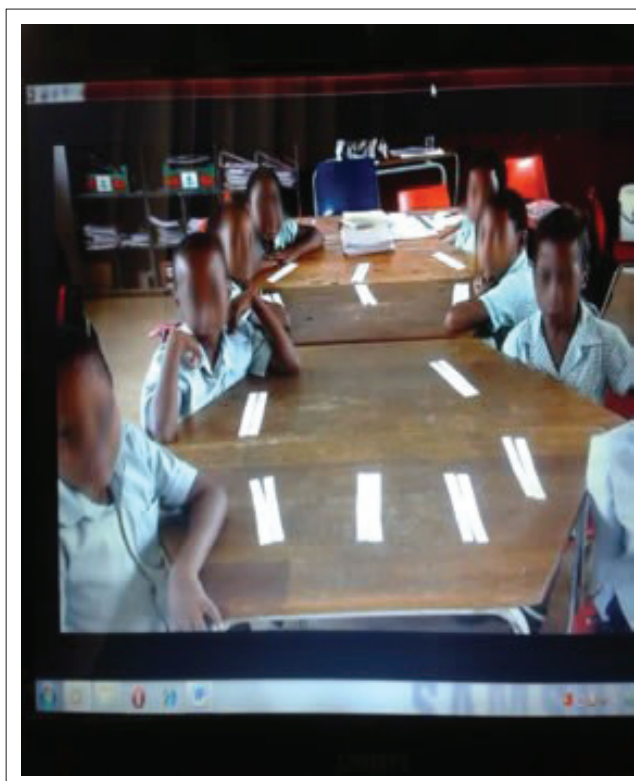
Ke fa motho a bua maswe ka yo mongwe kgotsa a seba ka ena

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 16: Dikarabo.

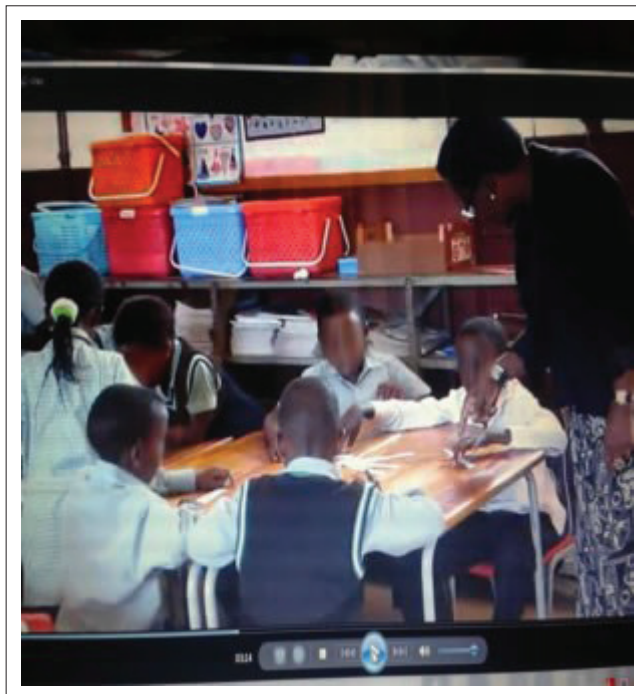
Sociolinguistic aspects in Phase 2

At the end of Phase 2 of the study, we wanted to determine whether the teachers' and learners' language usage had improved. In Phase 1, the sociolinguistic impediments had been much in evidence during the classroom observations and during interviews (Table 1).



Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 17: Idiom activity.



Source: Ramagoshi, R. M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

FIGURE 18: Supervision of idiom activity.

Language proficiency in Setswana is an integral aspect of this study. Therefore, it was important to observe during the teachers' lesson presentations how language proficiency of both teachers and learners had changed.

The above examples of influence by other standard and non-standard languages seemed to be less used in Phase 2 than they were in Phase 1 of the study. Two of the teachers consistently corrected the learners' use of non-standard language. Only one teacher seemed to be allowing the learners to use non-standard words without making an effort to correcting them. Code-switching and non-standard dialectal words as well as Pretoria Sotho were used less frequently than the non-standard loanwords

TABLE 1: Sociolinguistic effects on language proficiency in teaching idioms.

Use of Setswana non-dialect words	Standard Setswana	English translation
<i>O apere diaparo tse dipila.</i>	O apere diaparo tse dintle	She is wearing beautiful clothes
Use of non-standard loanwords – Sepedi		
O na le swele	<i>O na le pelo e mpe</i>	He/she has a cruel heart
<i>Go šiana</i>	<i>Go taboga/siana</i>	To run
<i>Aowa!</i>	Nnyaa!	No!
<i>Ba ja mpya.</i>	<i>Ba ja ntšwa</i>	They are poor
<i>Ka sejawejwale</i>	<i>Ka segompiano</i>	Modernity
Use of non-standard loanwords – English		
O na le jelase	<i>O na le lefufa/mona</i>	He/she is jealous
<i>Go tla llata</i>	<i>Go nna thari/Go tla morago</i>	To be late
<i>Nnese</i>	<i>ga nako</i>	Nurse
Mistress	<i>Mooki</i>	Teacher
<i>Dishopong</i>	<i>Morutabana</i>	At the shop
Colour blocking	<i>Mabenkeleng</i>	To wear clothes of different colours
	<i>Go apara mebala e e farologaneng.</i>	
Pretoria-Sotho		
Kwatile derived from Afrikaans <i>Kwaad.</i>	<i>O befetswe/O galefile</i>	He/she is angry
Use of non-standard loanwords – Afrikaans		
<i>Go reisisa</i> derived from the Afrikaans 'Om te reis'	<i>Go thuba lebelo</i>	To race
Use of code-switching		
<i>Go nwa</i> cooldrink	<i>Go nwa senotsididi</i>	To have a soft drink
<i>Ee!Teacher</i>	<i>Ee! Morutabana</i>	Yes, Teacher!

Source: Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

TABLE 2: Comparative analysis of Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Phase 1	Phase 2
-Teachers: Teachers did not understand what idioms are as part of imaginative language. -Learners: Learners were not taught and addressed using idioms because the teachers did not know them or teach them.	-Teachers: Teachers were confident about what idioms are, except Teacher B in School 1. However, the learners were introduced to what an idiom is, and with more practice she will improve. -Learners now know and understand what idioms are and why they are used.
Teachers did not use different strategies when teaching idioms because they were not guided or supported to do so.	We introduced the teaching of idioms using anecdotes to the teachers to give them an idea of how to teach idioms. Teachers can now use their own initiative and creativity in teaching through different teaching methods and strategies, such as role-play and demonstrations as well as anecdotes.
Teachers did not have any learning and teaching support material to teach idioms. Prescribed readers had idioms embedded in the stories, but the teachers could not identify idioms used in the book or use idioms for any incident in the book that lent itself to using an idiom. The workbooks provided by coaches mentioned how to use imagination, but the teachers did not identify the term <i>maithomo</i> in Setswana as imagination.	We made the teachers aware of the idioms in the prescribed readers and they had a chance to teach the idioms in the readers using <i>Setswana idioms in picture form</i> , which they kept to continue using in the teaching of idioms in their classes. They can use these teaching and learning support materials in the higher grades in their schools.
Teachers had never seen or taught idioms in picture form before.	Teachers came up with their own strategies when teaching idioms in picture form.
No challenging activities were used after teaching Setswana to the learners.	We introduced an activity based on idioms in picture form where the learners were paired and asked to match the idioms in flash cards with their answers. We could observe that it was the first time they did such an activity in pairs.
During individual interviews with Grade 3 teachers as well as with the focus groups from Setswana Grades 4–7 teachers, a number of sociolinguistic aspects surfaced, which are an impediment to Setswana language proficiency, such as code-mixing and code-switching, Pretoria Sotho and non-standard dialectal words.	The teachers' as well as the learners' Setswana language proficiency improved greatly after all the lessons on idioms had been taught. Teacher B still struggled with Setswana proficiency. She used a high number of code-mixing examples. This might be a confirmation that code-mixing is an impediment to Setswana language proficiency. The other two teachers were aware of how they used Setswana and they corrected all the non-standard words or phrases in the learners' responses.

Source: Ramagoshi, R. M., 2015, Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

derived from English. It is also important to note that the teachers used non-standard Setswana less often in Phase 2. This is encouraging as learners tend to imitate the language used by their teachers.

Findings regarding how learners decode idioms

The teachers in both schools explained the idioms by using Piaget's (1980) theory of teaching the learners from the known to the unknown, ensuring they understood the literal meaning of the picture before directing them to its idiomatic meaning. This study found that the literal first or idiom list subtheory was evident in the learners' interpretation of the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme. No evidence was found pointing to decoding in accordance with the other remaining four subtheories (see Figure 1).

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Conclusion and recommendations

The article focussed on how teachers in Grade 3 Setswana classes teach idioms and how the learners understand and decode idioms. Various methods and strategies for teaching idioms, including using idioms in picture form, were implemented, but the possibilities were not exhausted. This study showed to what extent the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme can help teachers teach idioms and learners understand and use Setswana idioms as imaginative language in Grade 3 classes as well as in their daily lives. Some of the idioms touched on values and morals and how one can promote these amongst friends and in the community. The teachers were able to come up with different teaching strategies (anecdotes, demonstrations and role-playing) after the researcher's demonstration.

Language proficiency showed a big improvement on Phase 1 of the study. The interrelationships of aspects of idiom teaching and learning as well as sociolinguistic impediments to the teaching of idioms in a multilingual situation were highlighted. Making the teachers aware of the importance of being Home Language teachers and the fact that learners imitate the way they speak prompted the teachers to guide the learners to use appropriate Setswana words during lesson presentations, whilst at the same time making the teachers conscious of how they used Setswana in the Home Language classes. As reiterated by Cochran-Smith, and Lytle (1993), Hopkins (1993) and Fishman and McCarthy (2000) cited by Lankshear and Knobel (2004:4), all agree that one of the purposes of teacher research is to 'enhance teachers' sense of professional role and identity and to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in the classroom'. This was seen in the positive findings in Phase 2 of this research. This helped in preserving Setswana culture and heritage.

Another important observation is that the South African context in relation to the teaching of idioms, proverbs and figures of speech in African languages is an area that has not been well researched. A broader range of interesting teaching strategies is much needed to promote proficiency in African languages. The *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme has exposed a new field that needs to be explored further, following the examples set by researchers such as Liu (2008), Gibbs (1987) and Cooper (1998). It is hoped that the *Setswana idioms in picture form* programme has given impetus to such research.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

I.J. was the project leader and my promotor. She helped in the design of the figures and tables and R.M.R. was her Doctoral student. R.M.R. did the field study, collection of data and analysis thereof that led to the intervention programme.

References

- Andah, B.W., 1995. The earliest human occupation and settlement in West Africa. The Epistemology of west African Settlements. Andah (Ed.), *African Peoples and Their Cultural Resources Series* 25(1), 8–33.
- Bauer, A.M. & Brown, G.M., 2001, 'Community in an inclusive high school', in A.M. Bauer & G.M. Brown (eds.), *Adolescents and inclusion: Transforming secondary schools*, pp. 73–84, Paul H. Brookes, Baltimore, MD.
- Bennet, T., 1995, *Studies in the language and culture of popular politics in Modern Britain*, Stanford University Press, Britain.
- Bobrow, S.A., & Bell, S.M., 1973, 'On catching on to idiomatic expressions', *Memory & Cognition* 1(3), 343–346. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3758/BF03198118>
- Bruner, J.S., 1960, *The process of education*, Vintage Press, New York.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S.L., 1993, *Inside Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*, Teacher College, Columbia University Press.
- Cooper, T.C., 1998, 'Teaching idioms', *Foreign Language Annals* 31, 255–266. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1998.tb00572.x>
- Department of Basic Education, 2011, *National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), in South Africa*, Government Printing Works, Pretoria.
- Ferrace, E., 2001, *Classroom-oriented Research*, Achievements and challenges, Edited by Mirosław Pawlak, Jakub Bielak, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak.
- Fishman, S., & McCarthy, L., 2000, *History of Collaborative Research*, Teacher College Press, New York.
- Gibbs, R., 1987, 'Linguistics factors in children's understanding of idioms', *Journal of Child Language* 14, 569–586. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305000900010291>
- Hockett, C.F., 1958, *A course in modern linguistics*, Macmillan, New York.
- Hopkins, D.N., 1993, *Control through communication*, The rise of system in American management, The rise of system in American management, The John Hopkins University Press, Maryland.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M., 2004, *A handbook for teacher research: From design to implementation*, Open University Press, New York.
- Liu, D., 2003, 'The most frequently used spoken American English idioms: A corpus analysis and its implications', *TESOL Quarterly* 37, 671–700. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588217>
- Liu, D., 2008, *Idioms: Description, comprehension, and pedagogy*, Routledge, New York.
- Malimabe, R.M., 1990, 'The influence of non-standard varieties on the standard Setswana of High School pupils', Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- McCarthy, C., Giardina, M.D., Harewood, S.J., Park, J. 2006. *Contesting Culture, Identity and Curriculum Dilemmas in the Age of Globalization, Post-colonialism, and Multiplicity*, Harvard Educational Review, Harvard Education Publishing Group.
- Mekgwe, P., 2011, *Go thuba lebelo*, Molteno Institute for Languages and Literacy, Gauteng Department of Education, Eldoradopark.
- Miruka, O., 1994, *Understanding oral literature*, Nairobi University Press, Nairobi.
- Moon, R., 1998, *Fixed expressions and idioms in English*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Mutasa, D.E., 1999, 'Language policy and language use in South Africa: An uneasy marriage', Paper presented to ALASA, The tenth international conference on African Languages, UNISA, Pretoria.
- Nieuwenhuis, J., 2010, 'Conceptualizing qualitative research within an emerging worldview', in K. Maree (ed.), *First steps in research*, pp. 47–66, J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria.
- Ntsanwisi, H.W.E., 1965, *The Idiom in Tsonga – A descriptive Study*. Dissertation submitted for the requirements of the degree Magister Artium. In the Department of African Studies (Language), University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Piaget, J.C., 1954, *The Psychology of Intelligence*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Company, London.
- Piaget, J.C., 1965, *To understand is to invent*, Grossman, New York.
- Piaget, J., 1980, *Language and learning, the debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Pooe, E., 2011, 'Phithhelelo ya Puiso Kwalo.' Toro ya ga Pule, in F., Rakumakwe (ed.), Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy, Gauteng Department of Education, Eldoradopark.
- Ramagoshi, R.M., 2015, *Teaching of idioms as part of imaginative language in Grade 3 Setswana classes*, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor. In The Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Seboni, M.O.M., 1980, *Diane le Maele a Setswana*, Lovedale Press, Cape Province.
- Steyn, M., 2014, 'Teaching the mathematical concept of time in Grade 2', Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Swinney, D.A., & Cutler, A., 1979, The access and processing of idiomatic expressions, *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 18, 523–534. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371\(79\)90284-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371(79)90284-6)
- Vygotsky, L.S., 1986, 'The problem of the cultural development of the child', *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 36, 415–434, Harvard University Press.